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Loose Ends at the Command Post

CIA Flunks Shop Safety Test

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The Central Intelligence Agency is unsafe.

That was the conclusion of a team of investigators assigned last year by the Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration to inspect the Langley headquarters and several other undisclosed offices of the giant spy agency.

OSHA regularly inspects federal agencies in an attempt to persuade them to conform with the federal safety standards imposed on private industry. For them the CIA assignment was not exactly "Mission Impossible," but their inspection report indicates that getting the CIA to follow a policy of safety first has not been what you'd call easy.

Among other things, OSHA found that the CIA's "Safety Branch" lacked top support within the agency because it was placed at a "low level" within the CIA's Directorate of Security. Personnel in the office, according to OSHA, were more involved in "bomb disposal," "letter-bomb training," and "checking of CIA personnel for classified documents" than they were in enforcing safety requirements.

Hazards spotted by the OSHA inspectors included: a lack of exit signs, "tripping hazard of wiring cords," improperly guarded fans, unmounted fire extinguishers, "very poor housekeeping" in a paint shop and excessive noise.

BECAUSE OF "a lack of executive support," the OSHA study states, the CIA's safety program has been frustrated. Removing safety hazards, it adds, has "made little progress" since a previous OSHA inspection.

"Since the previous evaluation the agency has replaced the safety director with an individual who had little previous experience in occupational safety and health," the report adds.

The report — which was released by the Health Research Group, a Ralph Nader organization

which obtained it under the Freedom of Information Act — caused a flurry of responses, both from OSHA and the CIA.

James F. Foster, OSHA's press spokesman, said the CIA's record was "very average" when compared to the safety records of approximately 20 other federal agencies that OSHA has inspected.

"I called up the Health Research Group and asked them why they released that one. It might have been better if they had found a worse agency," he said.

Asked which federal agencies rank below the CIA in the federal safety spectrum, Foster said that he wasn't familiar enough with the other inspection reports to name specific agencies.

A SPOKESMAN at the CIA said that the agency has never revealed how many people work at the huge Langley headquarters. He added, however, that outside estimates of the headquarters work force range "anywhere from 8,000 to 20,000."

The CIA spokesman added that the agency has already met one criticism leveled by OSHA. It has hired an industrial hygienist. However, she has been unable to report for work because she is in the midst of the CIA's elaborate security-clearance process.

CIA Director Stansfield Turner issued a statement in response to the OSHA report that said the safety and health program "has my full support." However, he rejected OSHA's suggestion that the safety and medical facilities be moved out of the security directorate.

"This agency possesses supportive and highly responsive offices of safety and medical services. Our employees are perhaps unique in their orientation toward these offices for assistance at any hour of the day or night," Turner noted.

Turner said that in the future that he and other top CIA official would be "personally available to provide support and guidance to our safety and health offices."